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Some Further Comments on Armenian Bird Names

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It was a few months more than ten years ago that I went with my family to live in Yerevan for a year; there my academic adviser at the Lezvi Institut was Academician G.B. Djahukian, and I presented him with my topic, Armenian bird names. So it fell as Academician Djahukian's lot to review the progress of a young, foreign stazhor, offering encouragement and giving helpful criticism. This he was very effective at doing, and I was impressed by his willingness to express an interest in something that shared a different part of the Armenian heart than it did the American.

And one certainly has fond memories of birding in the environs of Yerevan. Hoopoes outside Ejmiatsin, bee-eaters and rollers on the Ararat Plain, dippers on the Hrazdan River and storks' nests in villages everywhere. I also think particularly of a dinner given for me and my family at Academician Djahukian's residence. As if to stress his willing interest in things ornithological, he served for the main course a plump imported Bulgarian turkey, superbly roasted. We were all delighted with the occasion.

It is with all this in mind that I affectionately dedicate this paper to Academician Gevorg Beglari Djahukian on his sixty-fifth birthday.

Following are some various bird names, one of which I have treated elsewhere in another publication, and two I have never commented on before, but all of which I am describing here using new evidence.

1. *durēč* 'francolin, *Francolinus francolinus*.'

There is no doubt that the *durēč* is the francolin, since this is the strict sense that is repeated for the Persian form of this bird in the authoritative *Paradegān irān* (Scott 1975.114). It is further reinforced in its Arabic form by Alexander Russell, M.D., whose study two hundred years ago of the natural history of Aleppo is meticulous and detailed. Russell had a separate chapter on birds and there noted (1794.II.193) that the *duraġ* (*درج* [sic]) was a francolin, though this bird was actually absent from the immediate environs, of Aleppo. The meaning 'francolin' corresponds to the sense repeated in the twelfth-century Armenian physician Mkhitar Heratsi (1832.11): *het aynor kerakur t'et'ew ew parkešt kerakri, zerd hawu jag or parkešt hamemanov epac' lini, tuīayč ew t'oru, or ē ap'asianos* (here understand Gk. *ὁ φασιανός*), *ew ayl zor nman en soc'a*. "After this he ate a light, modest meal, such as a young hen, which was cooked with just a little amount of seasoning — the francolin and the *t'oru*¹ which is the same as pheasant, or another bird similar to it."

The Armenian term is clearly a loan either from Arabic or Persian, for both languages have the word *durrāj* (*درج*) which is from the Arabic root *daraja* 'to go around on foot,' a suitable word for a plump and almost flightless bird.²

There is a problem, however, in certain contexts. In the *Medical Handbook for Horses* (Chukaszian 1980.60) we have a passage that would imply that the *durēč* was a pheasant: *zi or lini ir mazd zēd turiči petri*. "For (the horse) has hair like a *durēč* has feathers." Here the mane or tail of the horse would correspond to the extravagant plumage of the pheasant and not at all to the unpretentious feathers of the francolin. This corresponds to the use of the word *durrāj* we find in the Persian *Shah Nameh*, where the bird is glossed as 'Fasan' in the concordance of Wolff (1935). This gloss is supported in such a phrase as *درودت جون پر دراج کرد* "He (Giv) made valley and plain like the feathers of the *durrāj*" (C. 714). The Arabic word is not attested in literature from an early date. Lane (1863.869) notes that it could be a variety of game birds, and adds that it is a post-classical word (it does not appear in the *Qoran*). But no Arabic source earlier than Russell's comment from 1794 is helpful. Two similar passages from Armenian twelfth-century grammarians attest only to the existence of the word outside of medical texts, but not to its identity. In Erznkatsi (Khacherian 1983.120) we have *k'oč'en . . . zdurēčn* 'durec'; and in Grigor Magistros (Adontz 1915.228) we have the expected parallel: *koč'en . . . zturičn* 'durēc', "they call the francolin 'durec/durēc'."

Thus we are left with two acceptable glosses. The technically correct ready of 'francolin' and another value of popular origin, 'pheasant'. Such twofold meanings are still common. In England the buzzard is a type of 'hawk,' while the word is used popularly in America to designate a 'vulture.'

2. *kuṛap* [= *gūrāb*] 'raven'

This bird name, written in the orthography of the Western Armenian dialect, is derived from Arabic *gūrāb* (غراب) 'raven'. It is an uncommon term, cited, to my knowledge, only by the grammarians. The earliest reference comes from the eighth-century grammarian Stephannos Siwnetsi (Adontz 1915.189): *i jaynē, orpēs' kuṛab, aḡraw, krunk, hołm, sik' ew ork' ayspisik'* "(but some are classified) according to voice: swallow, crow, *kuṛap*, crane, wind, breeze and so forth." In the eclectic twelfth-century author, Erznkatsi (Khacherian 1983.115), we note the source of Adontz's borrowing: *isk əst jaynin, orpēs cicarn, aḡraw, kuṛap, krunk, hołm, sik' ew ayspisik'* "But (some are classified) according to voice: swallow, crow, *kuṛap*, crane, wind, breeze and so forth."

Adjarian defines the word as 'crow (*aḡraw*)', as do the other twentieth-century dictionaries, taking the loan from Arabic. But it seems clear that Arabic *gūrāb* is not a 'crow' but a 'raven', and is so defined in Lane's Arabic dictionary and elsewhere. And even though the terms 'crow' and 'raven' are loosely used and frequently interchanged in most cultures, including Armenian and Arabic, the Armenian passages above from the grammarians would seem to stress that the *kuṛap* was a bird separate from the *aḡraw*, which it appears next to in the line from the grammarians.

The identity of Arabic *gūrāb* seems secure,³ though its one appearance in the Qoran initially casts some doubt on its identification with the *Corvidae* at all. In *Sūra* 5.34 we note: غر ييجث في الارض "God sent forth a *gūrāb* scratching in the earth." Yet none of the *Corvidae* would use their feet to scratch for things.⁴ The only appropriate bird that does this is the Blackbird, *Turdus merula*, which is a member of the Thrush family. Yet this hesitation can be removed by pointing out that Arabic *naḥaṭa fī* 'to scratch' is an idiom, and the basic meaning of *naḥaṭa* is to 'search, inquire' the equivalent of English "Let me scratch around and see what I come up with."

It thus seems that Arabic *gūrāb* and Arm. *kuṛap*, certainly as early as the eighth century, must be strictly regarded as 'raven.'

3. *hawors* 'a small bird easily caught in a net'

In the NHB and Bedrossian as well this term is glossed only as 'a fowler, Gk. ἱξευτής'. In fact the word also means exactly the opposite, standing instead for any of the several types of small birds easily caught in nets. These would include the many varieties of sparrows, starlings, thrushes, and other birds that are easily netted because of their abundance. Invariably there is little meat on birds of this size, but their plenitude compensates for this failing.⁵

The word appears three times in the Armenian Bible, twice in circumstances that are somewhat difficult.

Amos 8.1, 2 (bis): ew aha gorci haworsac' 'and behold a container of small birds.' The Greek reads somewhat differently: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄγγος ἱξευτοῦ 'and behold a fowler's basket'. The Hebrew differs, and offers 'a basket of summer fruits' (*qayits*), and it is clear that the Armenian somehow follows the Greek, but the Greek appears to be a mistranslation of the Hebrew, or at least our present version is incorrect. The Armenian version, where we find *haworsac'* in the plural, could not at all be translated as 'a container of fowlers', for that would not immediately make the best sense. Presumably each fowler would have his own, and one would not be shared among many. And, of course, the container could not at all be 'full of fowlers'.

Jer 5.26: zvarms haworsac' kangnec' in 'They set traps for small birds', the Greek original lacking the word for 'small birds': παγίδας ἔστησαν 'they set traps'. There is also no mention of "small birds" in the Hebrew original.

Lam 3.52: orsac'an zis ibrew haworsk' 'they, like fowlers, hunted me;' the Greek for which is: ἐθήρευσάν με ὡς στρουθίον 'they have hunted me like a small bird' (literally 'small sparrow', for *στρουθίον* is the diminutive of *στρουθός* 'sparrow'). Gk. *στρουθίον* is here a translation of Heb. *tsipūr* 'a small bird that may be trapped or snared; a sparrow.'

It is this passage that creates particular problems in the translation of *hawors*, for here, because *haworsk'* is plural, it must be in apposition to 'they' who hunt rather than 'me' who is hunted. We could suggest that there is a problem with textual transmission, and say that the Armenian passage should read *orsac'an zis ibrew *hawors* in order to conform to the Greek and Hebrew originals. But regardless, this constitutes the only passage in Armenian literature where *hawors* clearly means 'fowler, Gk. ἱξευτής' rather than 'a small bird, Gk. στρουθίον,' and it might well result from a faulty textual transmission.

Elsewhere, *hawors* is known in the Grammarians, and a passage, common to two twelfth-century authors, clearly distinguished between *hawors* 'a small bird' and *orsakan t'řč'noc* 'a bird of prey' in the phrase found in both Erznkatsi (Khacherian 1983.198) and Grigor Magistros (Adontz 1915.240): *isk hawakank' hasarakabar haworsac' kam orsakan t'řč'noc' arakank'*; *kand*, or *nšanakē miayn zaru arcui kam varužanak ew oč' zayl ok' i t'řč'noc'n* "(for they could say) 'bird-like' for birds which are preyed upon rather than 'masculine' for birds of prey; an example is *kand* which designates only the male eagle or falcon, and no other bird."⁶

It is, of course, not at all impossible that *hawors* could be both a 'fowler' and a 'small bird easily caught in a net'. Parallels appear⁷, and here note *k'arakop* (2 Kg 12.12): *c'nkarič's ew c'čartars ew c'k'arakop's* "to painters and masons and stone-cutters"; but I Ezr 6.25: *ew dnel kargs eris k'arakop's* "and he laid the cut stone in three rows".

FOOTNOTES

¹ Arm. *t'oru* is a loan from Per. تذرو (*tadru*), which appears in Greek as τετρώος or τέταρος 'pheasant', specifically stated by the lexicographer Pamphilus (ap. Athenasius 9.387e) to be a Median word. Elsewhere in Indo-European we have Skt. *tititir* 'francolin' (Vira 1949.363) and Lith. *tetervà* 'black grouse.'

² Richard Frye (*per lit.*) suggests that the Iranian term might not be from the Arabic, but rather an original Iranian word squashed into an Arabic mold by the process of folk-etymology. Bearing this in mind Firdausi's abhorrence of Arabic loan words, and his sincere intention of writing a work in a purified Persian, this point might be quite apt.

³ Russell (1794.II.197) discusses the *Corvidae* that appear in the Aleppo region, but does not give the local word for the 'raven', though he notes the 'crow' was *zāg* (زاع), a standard word.

⁴ Here see Goodwin, 1976.20, for a description of the way *Corvidae* search with their beak, not their feet.

⁵ I have eaten such birds in Armenia, caught and cooked on a *sofkhoz* near Ejmiatsin. Their meat is invariably dark, the flavor is somewhat strong and though they are pleasant for variety, they could not easily constitute a satisfying staple in one's diet.

⁶ The Armenian grammarians were diligently trying to pour Armenian into the Greek mold so well described by Dionysius Thrax. In order for this to be done, the Armenian needed to create some classifications in their language that did not otherwise exist. A particularly complicated desideratum was gender, of which Greek had three, and Armenian none. The passage quoted here demonstrates the efforts of Grigor Magistros, as recorded in Erznkatsi, to solve the problem.

⁷ Here I am indebted to a suggestion made by Robert Thomson.

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